Festivals

Anon

Within the Pagan community there are many holidays and Sabbats celebrated for various means, and not all celebrate each holiday/Sabbat in the same exact way or for the same reasons. The following is a general list of the Holidays most common between all the Sects within Neo-Paganism.

Yule

(Winter Solstice, December 20-23 (varies according to the particular date on the standard calendar according to when the Solstice will occur astronomically)). Longest night of the year, the turning point when the days shall afterwards grow longer as winter begins its passage into the coming spring. It is, in the Goddess worship, the time when she gives forth again to the birth of the Divine Sun child who shall be both child and eventually lover and father of the next child in the cycle. Winter Solstice for pagans is a time of feasting and the exchanging of gifts and is the original Holiday that the Christian religions modified into their own Christmas, even up to the birth of the child (Most theologians who have spent time studying the birth of Jesus admit he was born in either March or April, not the celebrated Christmas date we all know from the standard calendar - it was moved to this date to help induce Pagans to give up their old ways yet allow them their holidays during the spread of Christianity through Europe and the British Isles). Traditional adornments are a Yule Log, usually of oak, and a combination of mistletoe and holly (also all later plagiarized into Christian ways).

Candlemas

(Brigid's Day, February 2nd) Not common to all pagans, this is very popular with Wiccans and various Celtic sects. Brigid is the Celtic goddess of fire and inspiration (Poetry, smithcraft and healing) as well as yet another representation of the Fertility of Femininity and Love. Brigid had such a strong following among the Celtics that the Christian church decided it was easier to assimilate her into their own system, and so there came about the making of Saint Brigit and all the stories they created about her so that her followers would leave their old beliefs enough so they would not side with the Druids, who were known at that time as 'the snakes' because of their tendency to have tamed snakes that were used to help produce various healing mixtures via their venom, and who were violently opposing the Catholic church. In History, of course, the druids lost against the overwhelming odds presented by the church, led by a man who would then be himself sainted by the church, their Saint Patrick (who was no clergyman but a warrior). Thus Christian rule of various sorts came into Ireland. Handicrafts are often sacrificed to Brigid or

dedicated to her as they are started on this day. Its celebration is done with many candles and as usual much feasting. The Christians also took, moved slightly and used this date by creating St. Valentine and using the day for one of chaste love reflections.

Eostar

(Spring Equinox, March 20-23 dependent on actual astronomical event) This is the start in the pagan year of spring, at least among Wiccans and Celtics. The first flowers are praised and the Gods and Goddesses thanked for the true return to happier times for all. Eostar is one of the more colorful holidays, not one of the somber colors found in Yule and Candlemas. Feasting and socializing are the important factors in this holiday as well as the celebration of the return of color to the natural world. In the Christian calendar, again to draw early worshipers, they marked this as the final days and rebirth of Jesus (when according to history he died in June!)

Beltane

(May Eve, April 30th-May 1st) Most important to pagans, save for Samhain, I don't know of any Pagan group that doesn't celebrate this holiday in some way. Beltane is the great Fertility rite of life, starting at dusk on the 30th and continuing until the dawn of the 1st. The union of the God and Goddess to conceive the sun-child to be takes place upon this holiday, no matter which tradition of paganism is involved. Beltane is the one holiday most discouraged by the Christians, who didn't even use it as a point for a holiday of their own because the power and nature of the day involved. Still, even in Christianized Ireland the May day dance of the Maypole remained, as did the giving of flowers to those you loved or cared for as friends. The Maypole is a symbol of the union of the God and Goddess to create life, the pole itself a phallic symbol while the dancers and their streamers or vines of flowers represent the fertile womb of the goddess as it takes in the Phallus of the god and takes in his seed. Besides the Maypole often a bonfire is present, and members of the group are encouraged to jump the flames for luck and their own fertility. Food, drink and love are the order of the evening. In most sects the celebration of Beltane will become one large orgy as the participants are encouraged to enact their own unions of love. Beltane is the time of many marriages/handfastings in the pagan community (in some it is the point where one chooses to begin and end relationships of a physical nature). Clothing is very optional in most get-togethers on this holiday, and mostly it is sensual and colorful. Even those sects that are prudish about things tend to accept the rules of the holiday, as it is the holiday of free love. It is said that a child conceived on this day will grow up to wield great power and knowledge and to be healthier than upon any other.

Litha

(Summer Solstice, June 20-23, dependent on actual astronomical event) Held on the longest day of the year, the Solstice is the celebration of lights triumph over darkness and that of the bountiful beauty that light brings into life. Flowers are common in the circle, roses and bright cheerful wildflowers are upon the altar and usually worn by all. It is the changing point of the year, and the celebration of the spiral dance of the year is common among Wiccans. It a celebration with much joy, and much feasting. Many Wiccans will attire themselves in bright colors and equally bright adornments of flowers. Litha' usual food fare may include honey-cakes or cornbread. Litha is not celebrated by all sects nor in the same way.

Lughnasad

(August 1st) The great corn ritual of Wiccan belief (in Celtic realms this is the celebration of the wheat god, corn is an Americanization and it is possible there is an American Indian traditional holiday near this date that was borrowed by the American Neopagans). This is the big celebration of the harvest (Sort of a Pagan Thanksgiving, but the time clock is different as is that of the Celtics). Much feasting and dancing occur, though it is a bit more somber than many of the other holidays. Some Pagans celebrate this day as merely the day to bake their bread and cakes for the coming winter and do no actual rituals save that of blessing the foods prepared.

Mabon

(Fall Equinox, Sept. 20-23, dependent on actual astronomical event) A lesser holiday, this is not widely celebrated and is most come with Pure Wiccan groups, especially those who are based in the works of Starhawk and other Dianic sects. This is the weavers festival, and a braiding of cords are done in the process of casting a spell to add to ones life from what it is, each person weaving unto themselves what they wish and the coven as a whole weaving all the cords together to unite the power and efforts symbolically.

Samhain

(Halloween Oct 31st) The year ends traditionally in Wiccan beliefs with this holiday. Samhain is said to be the period of time when the gates between the worlds are least guarded and the veils their thinnest. It is a time for dimensional openings and workings, and also the celebration of the death of the year king. It is a somber holiday, one of dark clothes and thoughts for the dead, it is said to be the time when those of necromantic talents can speak with the dead and it is certainly a time to remember ones dead. It is a time of endings of relationships and bad situations and it is the time when one can see the glimmer of hope in the future. There are as many concepts attached to this holiday as any other.

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